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ABSTRACT

A common sexual stereotype, supported by research evidence, is that women are more sociable than men. In studies using standardized measures of social interests, social values, needs for inclusion and acceptance, and the need for affiliation, women nearly always score higher than men. In studies comparing the social skills of women and men, women nearly always display better social skills than men. Finally, studies comparing the friendships of women and men suggest that women are more involved than men with other people. These studies involve dyadic relationships; little research has been performed on sex differences in group memberships. Entering college freshmen (N=1100) completed questionnaires on their memories about high school groups and their expectations about college groups. The results indicated that women belonged to more high school groups than men, belonged to larger groups, remained group members longer, enjoyed their group memberships more, and regarded groups as more important than did men. Women reported more positive memories than men about high school groups, even when the kinds of groups they belonged to during high school were taken into account. Similarly, women reported more positive expectations about college groups, even when the kinds of groups that they wanted to join during college were taken into account. These results suggest that sex differences in sociability were responsible for the more positive questionnaire responses of the women in this sample. (NRB)

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Sex Differences In Group Memberships

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A common stereotype about the sexes is that women are more sociable than men. Although many sexual stereotypes have proven to be inaccurate, this stereotype is supported by a variety of research evidence. One area of research that is relevant to this stereotype involves studies comparing the scores of women and men on standardized measures of social interests (Crandall & Putnam, 1980; Greever, Tseng, & Friedland, 1973; Kaplan, 1978; Schneider & Reuterfors, 1981), social values (Palmer, 1982), needs for inclusion and acceptance (Exline, Gray, & Schuette, 1965), and the need for affiliation (Mark & Alper, 1980; Mehrabian, 1970; Veroff, Depner, Kulka, & Douvan, 1980). Women nearly always score higher than men on measures such as these, indicating that they are more motivated to establish and maintain relationships with other people.

Another relevant area of research involves studies comparing the social skills of women and men. When they interact with other people, women nearly always display better social skill than do men. At a nonverbal level, women sit or stand closer to their partners (Ickes & Barnes, 1977), maintain greater eye contact with them (Exline, Gray, & Schuette, 1965; Frances, 1979), and are more responsive to their partners' behavior (Anderson & Bem, 1981; Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976). Women are also much better at decoding the

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nonverbal behavior of their partners (Hall, 1978). At a verbal level, women spend more time talking with their partners (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982), are more likely to engage in self-disclosure with them (Cozby, 1973), and generally have more pleasant conversations (Hirsch, 1979; Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985; Wheeler, Reis, & Nezlek, 1983).

Finally, studies comparing the friendships of women and men represent a third area of relevant research. Women often belong to larger social networks (Burda, Vaux, & Schill, 1984), and their networks usually contain a greater proportion of close friends rather than mere acquaintances (Berndt, 1982; Eder & Hallinan, 1978; Hunter & Youniss, 1982; Lowenthal & Haven, 1968; Powers & Bultena, 1976). Women nearly always regard their friends as more valuable and important (Black & Angelis, 1974; Curtis, 1975; Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977), and they tend to spend more time with them as well (Hirsch, 1979; Latane & Bidwell, 1977; Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985; Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). This suggests that women are more involved than men with other people.

The research that I've just described involves dyadic relationships, but if women are really more sociable than men, then that ought to be readily apparent in their group memberships as well. Unfortunately, relatively little research on sex differences in group memberships has been performed. The purpose of our research, therefore, was to obtain some descriptive information about the actual group memberships of college women and men. Do women belong to more groups than men? Is group membership more important and enjoyable for women than for men? Are there any differences in the kinds of groups to which women and men belong? Our research was meant to

answer these and related questions.

The data that I am about to describe were collected as part of a much broader research project investigating socialization processes in small groups. This project was begun by John Levine and Dick Moreland, and has absorbed the time and energy of many other people as well, including Tom Brinthaupt, Mark Pavelchak, Paul Sweeney, and myself. In the fall of 1981, we collected some information about the group memberships of freshmen college students at the University of Pittsburgh. We surveyed over 1100 new students who were just entering Pitt that year. All of these students were 19 years of age or younger. Most of them came from working-class backgrounds, lived at home and commuted to school, and were the first persons in their families to attend college. Our sample contained 570 women and 564 men.

We distributed questionnaires to these students during freshman orientation sessions held about one week before school began. Students attended these sessions in small groups containing 20 to 30 persons apiece. Each group was led by a "mentor," an older student whose job was to help the freshmen adjust to college life by showing them around campus, answering their questions, and giving advice. These mentors, whom we had given special training, administered our questionnaires for us. The students were given up to 30 minutes to fill out their questionnaires, but they usually finished in less time. The mentors answered any questions and handled any problems that arose. They told us later that the students had no difficulties in filling out the questionnaires.

Our questionnaires contained items involving the students' memories about high school groups and their expectations about

college groups. The first part of our questionnaire focused on high school groups. The students were asked to list up to five groups that they belonged to during high school. For each group, the students were also asked to describe its size, the length of their membership, and how enjoyable and important it was for them to be a group member. The second part of our questionnaire focused on college groups. The students were asked to name <u>one</u> specific college group that they were likely to join during their freshman year. About two-thirds of the students were able to name such a group. These students were then asked to think about their chosen group and to list up to five rewards and five costs that might be associated with membership in that group. For each reward or cost listed, the students were also asked to describe its probability of occurrence and level of positivity or negativity. Finally, the students' feelings about their chosen group were measured by means of a special "feeling thermometer."

The data from the questionnaires allowed us to test two general hypotheses. Our first hypothesis was that women would have more positive memories than men about their memberships in high school groups. We expected women to belong to more high school groups, to remain group members for longer periods of time, and perhaps to belong to larger groups. We also expected women to regard their high school group memberships as more enjoyable and more important. Our second hypothesis was that women would have more positive expectations than men about college group memberships. We expected women to describe more rewards and less costs associated with membership in their chosen group. Women were also expected to describe the rewards of membership in that group as more probable and

more positive, and the costs of membership in that group as less probable and less negative. Finally, we expected women to have "warmer" feelings toward their chosen group.

Let's look first at the results involving memories about high school groups. Please note that most of our dependent measures were averages computed across whatever high school groups the students listed. Students who listed no high school groups at all, of course, were not included in these analyses. Also, please note that the average length of group memberships was measured in months. The average enjoyment and importance of group memberships were measured on 10-point scales, with higher scores indicating greater enjoyment and importance.

The results provided strong support for our first hypothesis. There were clear sex differences on every dependent measure. Women belonged to more high school groups than men. They also belonged to larger groups and remained group members longer than men. Finally, women enjoyed their group memberships more and regarded them as more important than did men.

Let's look now at the results involving expectations about college groups. There were 647 students, 343 women and 304 men, who listed a specific college group that they were interested in joining. Again, note that many of our dependent measures were averages that were computed across whatever rewards and costs the students listed. Also, please note that the probability of each reward and cost was measured on a 100-point scale. The valence of each reward and cost was measured on a 10-point scale, with higher scores indicating a greater level of positivity or negativity. Finally, feelings toward the group were measured on a 100-point "thermometer," with higher

scores indicating "warmer" feelings.

As you can see, our second hypothesis was strongly supported by the results as well. Once again, there were many clear sex differences. Women expected membership in their chosen group to involve more rewards, and they regarded those rewards as more probable and more positive. Women also expected membership in their chosen group to involve less costs, and they regarded those costs as less probable and less negative. Finally, women had "warmer" feelings toward their chosen group.

Let me summarize our results briefly. We found that women have more positive memories than men about high school groups, and more positive expectations than men about college groups. We believe that these results reflect the sex differences in sociability that I described earlier. However, there was at least one alternative interpretation of our results that seemed to be worth considering. Perhaps women belong to <u>better</u> high school and college groups than do men. Why? Well, women may possess more and better information about what high school and college groups are available to students, so that they are more likely than men to join the best ones. Or, women may contribute more than men to the high school and college groups that they join, so that those groups are improved as a result. In either case, women would end up belonging to better high school and college groups than men, which could account for their more positive responses on our questionnaires.

The simplest way to test this alternative interpretation of our results was to compare the responses of women and men to the same type of group. If women still respond more positively than men, even when they belong to the same type of group, then our results cannot

be explained by the hypothesis that women belong to better groups than men. We were able to divide high school groups into eight general categories, ranging from fine arts and media groups to honoraries to sports groups. Within each of these categories, we looked to see whether women and men still differed in the size of the groups that they joined, the length of time that they were group members, and how enjoyable and important they regarded their group memberships. By and large, the same sex differences that we observed in our general analyses emerged once again. Women had more positive memories than men about high school groups, even when the kinds of groups that they belonged to during high school were taken into account. Similar analyses of the subjects' expectations about college groups were also performed. We were able to divide those groups into nine general categories, ranging from fraternities and sororities to political and religious groups to service organizations. Within each of these categories, we looked to see whether women and men still differed in their beliefs about the rewards and costs associated with membership in their chosen group and in the "warmth" of their feelings toward that group. Once again, the same sex differences that we observed in our general analyses re-emerged. Women had more positive expectations than men about college groups, even when the kinds of groups that they wanted to join during college were taken into account.

These and other analyses of our data suggested to us that sex differences in sociability were indeed responsible for the more positive questionnaire responses of the women in our sample. We believe that research of this sort can have both theoretical and practical value. At a theoretical level, a careful analysis of

students' group memberships during high school and college might provide some new insights into the nature of sexual roles. At a practical level, sex differences in high school and college group memberships might have important implications for students' general mental health (Hirsch, 1979), and for their adjustment to college life (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1975). We are currently conducting further research designed to explore these and other such issues. For example, we have already collected and are analyzing data on the reconnaissance behavior of women and men toward college groups. We also hope to perform observational studies of how women and men who belong to the same college groups actually behave during group activities.

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"Women Are More Sociable Than Men"

*Women Have Stronger **Social Motivation** Than Men

*Women Have Better **Social Skills** Than Men

*Women Have Greater Levels of **Social Involvement** Than Men

Cross & Moreland (1985)

Sample

*1134 Freshmen (570 Women, 564 Men)

*19 Years of Age or Younger

*Working-Class, Commuters, Newcomers

Procedure

*Questionnaires Distributed in August During Freshman Orientation Sessions

*Subjects Completed Questionnaires in Small Groups Supervised by "Mentors"

*Questions Focused on High School & College Groups

*Memories About High School Groups (Number, Size, Length of Membership, Enjoyment, Importance)

*Expectations About College Groups (Number, Probability, and Positivity/Negativity of Rewards & Costs, "Feeling Thermometer" Scores)

Hypotheses

*Women Have More Positive Memories Than Men About High School Groups

*Women Have More Positive Expectations Than Men About College Groups

Table 1

Memories About High School Groups

Questionnaire Measure	Women Mean	Women S.D.	Men Mean	Men S.D.	Sex Difference
Number of Group Memberships	3.72	1.23	2.98	1.31	9.25**
Average Size of Groups	42.53	19.34	39.74	21.27	2.31*
Average Length of Memberships	17.95	9.12	14.86	9.84	5.52**
Average Enjoyment of Groups	7.88	1.50	7.70	1.68	2.00*
Average Importance of Groups	7.53	1.66	6.92	1.96	5.55**

Note. The sample contained 570 women and 564 men. The average length of group memberships was measured in months; the average enjoyment and importance of group memberships were measured on 10-point scales, with higher scores indicating greater enjoyment and importance. Sex differences were tested using one-tailed t-tests.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Expectations About College Groups

Questionnaire Measure	Women Mean	Women S.D.	Men Mean	Men S.D.	Sex Difference
Number of Rewards	2.49	1.04	2.36	1.03	1.63*
Average Reward Probability	84.71	22.24	82.03	22.27	1.53*
Average Reward Positivity	8.92	2.12	8.32	2.44	3.33**
Number of Costs	1.22	0.99	1.38	1.03	-2.00**
Average Cost Probability	48.88	38.25	53.60	37.85	-1.57*
Average Cost Negativity	3.30	3.23	3.95	3.26	-2.50***
Feelings Toward Group	76.06	18.40	71.68	20.08	2.88***

Note. The sample contained 343 women and 304 men, all of whom intended to join a specific college group during their freshman year. The probability of each reward and cost was measured on a 100-point scale, and the valence of each reward and cost was measured on a 10-point scale, with higher scores indicating a greater level of positivity or negativity. Feelings toward the group were measured on a 100-point "thermometer," with higher scores indicating "warmer" feelings. Sex differences were tested using one-tailed t-tests.

* $p < .10$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

Results

*Women Have More Positive Memories Than Men About High School Groups and More Positive Expectations Than Men About College Groups

*Women Are More Sociable Than Men During High School and College

but

*Women May Belong To Better High School and College Groups Than Do Men

*Do Women And Men Differ In Their Memories About The <u>Same</u> High School Groups, Or In Their Expectations About The <u>Same</u> College Groups?

Yes

*Women Are More Sociable Than Men During High School and College